

To: Representative Vulkmir, chairperson and Members of the Committee on Health and Healthcare Reform
From: Alicia Boehme, Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) and mother of child with hearing loss.
Date: March 5, 2008
Re: Assembly Bill 912

Disability Rights Wisconsin is the designated protection and advocacy agency in the state of Wisconsin. I am not only an advocate at DRW, but also a mother of an 18-month-old boy named Oliver who has bilateral mild to moderate hearing loss.

We learned about the existence of Assembly Bill 912 and this hearing late Wednesday afternoon. We have not had time to fully analyze the implications of this bill. For this reason and others **we are here to express our concerns for this bill and recommend that you vote against passing AB 912 out of Committee at this time.**

I believe that the idea to cover children under BadgerCare came out of a hearing last week for Assembly Bill 133 and Senate Bill 88. AB 133 and SB 88 would require insurance companies to pay for hearing aids and cochlear implants for children under the age of 11 years old.

Representative Lasee worked with Senator Lassa and Representative Schneider to come up with an amendment with bipartisan support. Earlier this week, AB 133 and SB 88 passed out of the Assembly Committee on Insurance **with bipartisan support and a vote of 9 to 2 in favor of the bill.** This is quite an accomplishment. Families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and other individuals from all over the state came to testify in favor of AB 133 and SB 88 just a week before the bill passed out of committee. The hearing lasted over 7 hours and families spoke passionately about the bill that they want to see made into law.

SB 88 has passed the Senate this past fall and now we are awaiting the bill to be voted on the Assembly floor before the end of the session.

By contrast, Assembly Bill 912 does not appear to yet be officially introduced; advocates and family members have neither seen nor understand the implications of the bill; there does not appear to be bipartisan support of the bill; and there is not enough time to pass the bill in the Assembly and the Senate before the end of the session.

As stated above, there are numerous questions that come to mind with a cursory review of the bill.

- How will the bill be paid for, and is it reasonable for this bill to pass given the current deficit the State of Wisconsin has incurred?
- Will the State of Wisconsin need to apply for a federal waiver in order to implement this plan?
- What fees will families be required to pay under BadgerCare Plus on top of the premiums and co-pays/cost-sharing that they already pay under their private insurance?
- Will they be covered under the Standard or the Benchmark plan? What are the differences between those plans and Medical Assistance and the types of devices covered?
- Will families be free to follow professional recommendations regarding the best device for their child's unique hearing loss, or will they be restricted to a few pre-selected devices?

In addition, we have concerns because the proposed bill allows the department to set cost-sharing requirements for hearing aids and cochlear implants. This loophole in conjunction with the BadgerCare Plus monthly premiums and private insurance costs that families already pay for is excessive and confusing.

AB 912 is an idea—an idea that has not been adequately thought through, and an idea that is not a viable to be made into law this session.

There is a solution. AB 133 and SB 88 have bipartisan support. In fact, they passed out of the Assembly with a 9 to 2 vote. And families support it.

A vote in favor of AB 912 is a vote against children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Families need relief now. AB 133 and SB 88 are poised to accomplish this. Encourage AB 133 and SB 88 to be voted on the floor then vote in favor to make a difference now in the lives of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and let democracy prevail.